

inside to demolish the equipment and supplies of the *Record*—marking the beginning of overt violence in the city. The men cheered as they broke into the building, destroying office furniture and the press. As men entered the press offices, items such as a beaver hat, drawings of Manly, and a sign reading “The Record Publishing Co.” were thrown into the street to cheering onlookers who could not get inside.²⁵ A fire started in the building, forcing the men inside to leave the structure and return to the street to watch it burn. Later investigation among the ranks of men involved concluded that hanging kerosene lamps inside the building were knocked to the floor, which was saturated with more kerosene found stored in a closet. The person who struck the match was never named, but William Watson and Dan Rowan

were identified as the ones responsible for spreading the kerosene, which accelerated the fire as it spread quickly throughout the two-story frame building.²⁶ Waddell and other leaders were displeased that the fire broke out since they only wanted to damage the press and the ability of the black community to produce a newspaper. It was later recalled that “a mob, no matter how well disciplined, is no stronger than its weakest link.”²⁷ Additionally, the building was perilously close to the prominent St. Luke’s A. M. E. Zion Church and private homes. As cinders began to catch fire on shingles of nearby houses, the alarm was sounded from a firebox at the corner, and men from the neighborhood fire station responded to the call. Whites involved in the destruction of the press assisted with extinguishing the



Remains of Love and Charity Hall/ Record Printing Offices. African American firefighters visible on second floor as white children watch from steps of St. Luke’s.

Image courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library

²⁵ Prather, *Democracy Betrayed*, 113.

²⁶ Hayden, *WLI*, 85; *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 10, 1898.

²⁷ Hayden, *Story of the Wilmington Rebellion*, 15.